

Later in the day, a reference librarian seats herself at the teletype. She needs a special bibliography for a patron. By typing in a subject heading, or LC class number, or Dewey class number, she has the bibliography in just a few minutes. If the list of books proved to be a long one, she could request that the list be printed at the Service Center and sent to her the next day. This "off-line printout" would keep the teletype from being tied up for a long time.

The kind of library we've been looking at is not, necessarily, a large and well funded academic or public institution with its own library automation project. It could be the library for a small city, or the processing center for a school system, or a junior college, or a centralized technical processing office for a library network. Any library with a volume of work requiring more than a very few librarians and clerks may find the kind of automated library services we've just described to be economical and easy as well as providing new techniques which add to the library's capabilities for serving its patrons.

Without making large investments to build computer systems of their own, many libraries are going to be able to realize some concrete benefits from the latest developments in library automation. Progress in developing automated assistance which the average library can afford has been slow because developmental costs have been huge, computing machinery has not been

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readily adaptable to handling library operations, and operating expenses could not be brought within a justifiable limit. In addition, the cost for turning a library's catalog and other bibliographic records into machine-readable form has been so high as to be out of the question for most libraries whose budgets are limited and subject to the exacting scrutiny of penny-conscious legislators.

Now, however, the computer technology known as "time-sharing" provides an economical alternative to each library's installing and operating its own computer system. Time-sharing permits a computer at a central location to work for a number of users simultaneously. Computers have become so large and so fast that a single user at a time is not likely to require more than a small percentage of the computer's capabilities. It is thus more economical to have the computer working for several people at the same time. To each user, it appears that he has the computer all to himself. An additional benefit made possible by time-sharing is the capability for a user to be "on-line" to the computer. During the on-line operation, the user and the computer are able to talk to each other. This is a desirable feature when you want a quick answer to a question or when you want to pass some information on to the computer at your convenience instead of at some rigidly scheduled time.

A user talks to the computer through a terminal such as the teletype machine. The terminal and the computer are normally connected with each other by an

THE SDC
LIBRARY
SERVICE
CENTER



Facade of the Library of Congress. Established in 1800, the Library of Congress was made fully responsible for listing copyright deposits in 1906. The idea of a deposit copy extends back at least as far as the fourth century B.C. when Lycurgus the Athenian orator urged that a carefully executed copy of the works of the great dramatists be preserved in the public archives of Athens. The earliest known legally enforced depository law was enacted in France in 1537.

THE SDC LIBRARY SERVICE CENTER

In recent years many librarians have recognized the economic necessity for some sort of centralized book processing service. To begin to meet this need, some libraries have joined together to set up technical processing centers, and commercial firms have offered books for sale ready for shelving. Through time-sharing, SDC is now extending the service center concept by offering specially designed computer services that support not only technical processing but almost every other library function as well.

Today, as in the past, few libraries can afford to design, install and operate a computer system of their own; even fewer can generate sufficient work to keep a computer busy. Through the SDC Library Service Center, however, individual libraries can now get immediate computer-based assistance as often as they require from a system designed expressly for library use. The cost of these services is low because all users share a small portion of the expenses for operating the system; no single library has to bear the whole burden.

A library using the service center does so on an individual basis. That means there is no need to forfeit autonomy to gain the benefits of centralized processing. On the other hand, the service center affords a good mechanism for increasing cooperation among the participating libraries, if they so wish, by providing up-to-date information on the holdings of each library.

Because the SDC Library Service Center is based on a time-shared computer, the amount of service to be purchased can be closely tailored to the needs of each individual library. It is not necessary to pay for products that are not wanted, as would be the case if services were offered in one package on a take-it or leave-it basis.

The Library Service Center concept provides the computing power that libraries need now, together with access to machine-readable catalog records at little or no cost for conversion. Because the costs for computerization and catalog conversion are the two major obstacles in the path of library automation, the advent of the Library Service Center should usher in the first widespread use of automation in American libraries.